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*Some Folk-Stories of Rāmdās the Last of the Sages.*—By  
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THE most picturesque figure in Marathi folk-lore is that of Shivaji, the great military chief who broke the power of the Moguls and gave the Hindus back their independence.

Next to him, and enshrined more deeply in the popular affection, stands Rāmdās, Shivaji's Guru or spiritual instructor. The king was a foreigner, often despotic—though that is a small matter to a Hindu—frequently as terrible to his friends as to his foes. But Rāmdās was one of themselves, the ideal holy man, the poet whose verses are still treasured, the founder of a popular religion, the gentle sage who went about doing good, and whose ready wit and keen sense of humor confounded his foes and endeared him to all with whom he came in contact.

The facts of his life are heavily encrusted with legend, the wild legend in which the Hindu mind revels; but some truth can be gathered in tiny scraps.

He was born in a small village near Atit, about eleven miles south of Sātāra, a Brahman of the Deshāsta caste, the younger of two sons. In his childhood, so great was his love for the god Rāma that he refused to go to school, much to his father's disgust, and spent his whole time collecting sacred pebbles and worshipping them. At six or eight years of age the ceremony of investiture with the sacred *mūñja* was performed, and he was very happy to become a Brahmācārin, or adult unmarried ascetic; and unmarried he resolved to remain all his life. That he was now permitted to recite the holy texts gave him great pleasure; and though he had no Guru, he tried his best to keep all the forms as he had read them or seen them explained in the religious books. When he was nine or ten years old, his father decided that it was time for him to marry, and selected the girl and fixed the date for the ceremony. Rāmdās had said little about his resolve not to marry, and what little he said his father did not heed. So the boy allowed the preparations to go on, even to the point where the shawl is dropped between the "high contracting parties," and the priest begins to say the irrevoca-

ble words. But just as the priest opened his mouth Rāmdās descended from the marriage throne, told his father he would not marry, and leaving the house made his way to the jungle. Here, in a cave on the side of the hill Sajanagara, near Parali, about four miles from Sātāra, he dwelt and worshipped “with heart and soul,” performing the Sāndhya ceremonies according to all the prescribed rites. At the end of twelve years Rāma appeared to him and endowed him with miraculous power. After that he took up his residence in the village of Parali; and in the great temple at that place are still to be seen his stick, his drinking-cup, and his coach. Here Shivaji heard of him, went to visit him, and was so pleased that he made him his Guru. Thenceforth the king did nothing, great or small, public or private, without consulting this sage. Rāmdās had many disciples, of whom Kalyāṇa was the chief; and together they traveled and revived the Hindu religion all over India as far north as Benares, introducing the worship of Mārōti, a popular god, not so hedged about with ceremonies as are most of the other Hindu divinities.

Many anecdotes, most of them of miraculous character, have crystallized about the name of Rāmdās.

It is said that one day when Rāmdās was at Parali, Shivaji wished to see him. No sooner had the thought taken shape in the king’s mind than Rāmdās stood before him in Sātāra Fort. The king was amazed, but as he was fond of him and an honest and true disciple he made bold to ask how he had come there in so short a time. Rāmdās answered that he should see; and he forthwith placed one foot on Sātāra Fort and the other on the fort at Parali four miles distant. Shivaji began to be afraid when he saw this, and the sage resumed his natural form. Thenceforth the king regarded him more highly than ever before.

There was another sage who had miraculous power, but he was very proud. Rāmdās decided that something should be done to lessen his pride. So one day he took a buffalo and killed it before all the people. Everyone was horrified, and they sent word to Shivaji and to the other sage. Meanwhile Rāmdās had the flesh cut up and put into baskets and carried into the cook-room; and when the king appeared, he asked what he had come for. Shivaji said nothing, but the rival sage answered

that it was not proper for a Brahman to kill a buffalo. Rāmdās asked, where was any buffalo killed? The sage replied that its flesh was in the cook-room. Rāmdās told him that if that were so, to bring it out. The sage went to get it, but strange to say, all the baskets were filled with dishes! Then the sage fell at the feet of Rāmdās and begged him to pardon him; but Rāmdās replied that it was only to remove his pride that he had done this.

Rāmdās was kind to all and made no distinction between Brahmans, Mohammedans, etc. One day a Mohammedan emperor invited him to meet him in one of the forts. As soon as they were inside, the emperor had all the doors locked and asked the sage how he could get out. In these old forts on the hill-tops, there are small holes at the edge through which those within could fire down on the enemy below. Rāmdās replied that he could go out through one of these holes. The emperor did not believe him and told him to go. Whereupon the sage made his body smaller in diameter than a bullet, and passed through quite easily. The emperor was greatly amazed, and from that day began to love and reverence him.

The disciples of Rāmdās were very honest and just, and greatly devoted to him. One of the disciples used to give the sage *wida*, first chewing the leaf to make it soft, so that he could eat it easily. Rāmdās by his miraculous power knew this, but because the man was a good disciple, he ate the *wida* that he brought him. One day a gentleman told Rāmdās all about it. The latter told the man to tell the disciple to send the instrument by which he reduced the *wida* to pulp. When the disciple heard this he took a sword, and cutting off his own head, handed it to the man. At this the gentleman began to be afraid, but he was obliged to carry the head to the sage. When he told Rāmdās, the latter replied that the disciple would do anything for him, so he loved him and ate the *wida*; but he was afraid the disciple would die without his head. So he took the head and put it on again, and it was as good as ever: but he did not set it quite straight, and the disciple ever after had his head twisted a little to one side.

Kalyāṇa was the first and chief disciple of Rāmdās. One day, in order to put the latter to the test, Rāmdās did a miracle. He called together all his disciples and showed them a great

swelling on his thigh from which he was suffering much pain, and he told them that if any of them would suck the matter from it he would recover, but otherwise he would die. All professed great sympathy, but as he called on them one by one to perform this service, "they all with one accord began to make excuses." But when he came to Kalyāṇa and asked if he were willing, this disciple replied that he had made an offering of his life to him and therefore he would do anything. Then he applied his lips to the swelling, but as he did so the lump became a large and sweet mango! Everyone was astonished, and Kalyāṇa became chief of the disciples.

At another time, to put Shivaji to the test, Rāmdās told the king that he was very sick, but that if he would bring him some milk from a tigress he would recover. The king resolved to bring the milk or die in the attempt. So he started out and came to a thick jungle and entered it and began to search for a cave. Presently he found one with a big tigress inside. She was very fierce and terrible, and as he approached her she made at him. But strong in his resolution, he was not afraid, but went boldly up to her and began milking her. This enraged her still more, and she tried to eat him, but he persevered and filled his pot with the milk. Then he started to go home; but as he looked back he saw, not the tigress, but the sage! So the king fell at his feet rejoicing, and thenceforth Rāmdās regarded him as one of his most devoted disciples.

[The *Deshāsta* Brahmans mentioned in this article are those of the Deccan from Ahmadnugger to Sātāra, in contradistinction to the Konkon Brahmans of the coast. *Mārōti*, as Miss Grieve carefully writes the word, to give the pronunciation, is Sk. *Māruti*, in the epic a late epithet of Hanuman, but now the usual name of this deity in the mouth of the common people. The statement that the worship of Hanuman was introduced by Rāmdās is interesting as a legend. Historically it may be doubted whether it was even revived; perhaps it was extended or emphasized by the saint. The *wida* is the betel, Sk. *vṛtikā*. —ED.]